

This woodpecker is large and unmistakable, and this record extends the known range considerably northwards. In flight it has a grotesque resemblance to a cross between a hornbill and a crow! The white patch on the lower back is distinctive. A loud cackling laugh appears to be commonly uttered. A pair seen near Sirsi (Dharwar Dist.) on the 8th Sept. 1939, also kept in touch in a similar manner. The female of this pair was shot and had dormant ovaries. Her stomach contained a mass of large black ants, as well as slivers of wood $\frac{1}{2}$ in. to $\frac{3}{4}$ in. long.

Among other birds seen around Suriamal, Grey Tits (*Parus major*) were common, and one of them was observed carrying nesting material. The Little Sunbird (*Leptocoma minima*) was also common. Both these species are unrecorded from the immediate neighbourhood of Bombay.

BOMBAY,

HUMAYUN ABDULALI.

June 21, 1941.

X.—THE BOOMING BITTERN [*BOTAURUS STELLARIS STELLARIS* (LINN.)] IN LOWER BENGAL.

Recently, the Director, Zoological Survey of India, received from Mr. D. J. McMullin, Assistant Superintendent, Coaching, East Indian Railway (Calcutta), a beautiful female specimen of the Booming Bittern. Mr. McMullin writes that he shot the bird on the afternoon of January 7, 1940, among *hugla* grass in a *bhil* (lake) about two miles south-west of Barasat (Barasat Sub-Division, 24-Parganas District, Lower Bengal), and adds that 'it was accidentally shot as it was taken for a Bengal florican when it rose'.

The measurements of the bird are as follows:—Body-length, 485 mm.; Wing, 300 mm.; Tail 120 mm.; Tarsus, 90 mm.; Culmen, 66 mm.; and Mid-toe with claw, 120 mm.

The Booming Bittern is a palaeartic bird resident in the temperate areas from Western Europe to Manchukuo and Japan. It migrates in winter largely to the countries around the Mediterranean and to South-West Asia, and in much smaller numbers to India, Burma and Southern China. Within Indian limits it occurs in small numbers throughout Northern India and as far south as Bombay, the Deccan and even, it is said, Bangalore. It does not breed in India. (Curiously enough, Hartert in his standard work *Die Vögel paläarktischen Fauna*, vol. II (1920), pp. 1262-1263, does not mention India, Burma and Southern China within the over-wintering range of this bird.)

Owing to its rarity, the bird is seldom encountered in India and I have, therefore, thought it fit to record a recent instance of its occurrence in Bengal. Apart from rarity, its capture is made difficult by the fact that it is a nocturnal bird, hiding by day in long, dense beds of rushes and reeds in swamps,

Intimation of any future Indian records of this bird, as well as skins of it, will be welcomed by the Zoological Survey of India, Calcutta.

CALCUTTA,
10th April, 1941.

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XI.—BIRD 'BATHING' IN ANTS.

I wonder if the following note on the 'anting' habit of the Common Mynah will be interesting to the readers of your esteemed *Journal*.

On the morning of December 14, 1940, I saw a pair of Common Mynahs (*Acridotheres tristis*) 'anting' themselves on the lawn in front of the Museum. The birds were seen to hop about in the midst of a colony of Red Ants (*Oecophylla smaragdina*) picking them in their beaks one after the other, rubbing them against the underparts of their wings and tail and finally dropping them. After being thus engaged for about three minutes, they flew away. On the scene of their activities, I found a number of red ants strewn about, dead and dying. All had their abdomens flexed and crushed at the pedicel and were reeking of formic acid recently liberated.

Again, on June 28, 1941, at the same spot, I saw a pair of mynahs engaged in the same act. This time I had noticed the birds at a distance feeding among the grass and working their way in the direction of the ants. As my curiosity was roused, I took my stand nearby to watch. On seeing the ants they at once set to pick them up in their beaks and behave exactly as before, spreading and quivering the tail during the act. They did this for nearly a minute and then moved on. Soon, a pair of White-headed Babblers (*Turdoides striatus*) feeding in another part of lawn came that way, but took no notice of the ants, and hopped clear of them to the adjoining lawn. I made an examination of the spot as soon as the birds had left, but there was no sign of the shambles I expected to see, save for a disabled ant which I removed to my table. Under a lens, the legs appeared intact and though the abdomen was bent over on its stalk, it was free from rupture and presented no trace of any body juice. At first the ant could hardly move, but soon it recovered and was able to get about as vigorously as ever, so I had it restored to its comrades.

According to the notes previously published on the subject in this *Journal*, the following birds have been observed to pick up and press on their plumage insects with obnoxious effluvia:—

(1) *Dryonastes coerulatus* and the nestlings of *Trochalo-pterum nigrimentum* and *erythrocephalum*, *Dendrocitta baylei*, (Rhynchota)—B. B. Osmaston.